

Message Text

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 01009

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SUBJECT: EDITORIAL IN IRISH TIMES MARCH 22, 1978

FOLLOWING EDITORIAL APPEARED IN IRISH TIMES
MARCH 22, 1978 UNDER HEADING OUTWARDS FROM
LEBANON:

IT IS NO COINCIDENCE THAT ISRAEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT
YESTERDAY OF A CEASEFIRE IN SOUTH LEBANON MESHE
EXACTLY WITH THE OPENING OF THE WASHINGTON TALKS
BETWEEN PRESIDENT CARTER AND PRIME MINISTER BEGIN.
ON MONDAY ISRAELI SPOKESMEN DECLARED THAT ANY
CEASEFIRE WOULD HAVE TO BE OBSERVED BY BOTH SIDES.
YESTERDAY'S DECISION, HOWEVER, WAS UNILATERAL;
AND THE ISRAELIS MUST KNOW BETTER THAN ANYBODY
THAT THE CHANCES OF THE PALESTINIAN GUERRILLAS
LAYING DOWN THEIR ARMS AT THIS STAGE ARE
NEGLEGIBLE. THE CEASEFIRE, THEN, IS BEING USED -
QUITE LEGITIMATELY - AS A DIPLOMATIC TRANQUILLISER
FOR THE AMERICANS.

EVEN BEFORE THE ISRAELIS CROSSED INTO LEBANON IN
RETALIATION FOR THE PALESTINIAN RAID, IT WAS
OBVIOUS THAT THE WASHINGTON TALKS WOULD BE THE
MOST DIFFICULT, AND LEAST FRIENDLY, ENCOUNTER
BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS SINCE THE FOUNDING
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OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL. MR. CARTER WAS
PROFOUNDLY DISAPPOINTED BY THE FREEZING OF THE
EGYPTIAN INITIATIVE ON PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
FOR WHICH HE HAS COME INCREASINGLY TO BLAME
THE INFLEXIBLE ATTITUDE OF MR. BEGIN TO JEWISH
SETTLEMENTS IN OCCUPIED TERRITORY, AND TO SELF-
DETERMINATION FOR PALESTINIAN RESIDENTS.

THIS IS WHAT THE AMERICANS SEE AS THE ISSUE OF FIRST IMPORTANCE. THEY BELIEVE THAT IF THE SADAT INITIATIVE CAN BE RE-STARTED, PROGRESS ON THE BROADEST DIPLOMATIC FRONT ONCE AGAIN WILL BE POSSIBLE. MR. BEGIN, ON THE OTHER HAND, WHILE CONTINUING TO INSIST ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN NEGOTIATIONS, WANTS TO CONCENTRATE FIRST ON LEBANON, AND THE QUESTION OF WITHDRAWAL, WHICH IS THE SUBJECT OF A UN RESOLUTION, INITIATED BY THE UNITED STATES. THUS THERE IS THE DANGER, FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE TALKS, OF A CONFLICT OF PRIORITIES.

YET MR. BEGIN AND MR. CARTER BOTH KNOW THAT A PUBLIC DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THEM WOULD BE OF GREAT ADVANTAGE ONLY TO THE ASSORTED ENEMIES OF EACH. WASHINGTON KNOWS THAT IT HAS THE POWER TO EXERT EXTREME SANCTIONS ON ISRAEL, SIMPLY BY DENYING THE LATTER THE ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND MILITARY AID WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO ITS SURVIVAL. THERE IS A GREAT GULF FIXED, HOWEVER, BETWEEN THREATENING TO USE THAT POWER AND ACTUALLY USING IT. THE TRADITIONAL BOND BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES REMAINS STRONG AND FUNDAMENTAL. SIGNIFICANTLY, MR. CARTER WENT OUT OF HIS WAY YESTERDAY TO CONDEMN THE PALESTINIAN ATTACK WHICH LED TO THE UNCLASSIFIED

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INVASION OF SOUTH LEBANON.

THE PROBLEMS WHICH THAT OPERATION HAS THROWN UP ARE MANIFOLD. THE ISRAELI ARMY HAS GONE IN IN CONSIDERABLE STRENGTH, AND CLAIMS TO HAVE INVESTED VIRTUALLY ALL THE TERRITORY SOUTH OF THE LITANI RIVER. BUT YESTERDAY FIGHTING CONTINUED AROUND THE HARBOUR CITY OF TYRE; AND THE ISRAELIS WOULD SEEM TO BE FACED WITH A VIRTUALLY INTRACTABLE GUERRILLA WAR. AS THEY DO NOT RECOGNISE, AND HENCE WILL NOT NEGOTIATE WITH, THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANISATION, THE BUSINESS OF WITHDRAWAL HAS TO BE CONDUCTED WITH THE ALMOST POWERLESS LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, THE SYRIAN OCCUPATION FORCES AND THE UN.

WHO CAN SPEAK AUTHORITATIVELY FOR THE PLO? MR. YASSER ARAFAT HAS HIS DIFFICULTIES. IT HIS MILITARY ARM, AL FATAH, WHICH MOUNTED THE RAID INTO ISRAEL, CONTINUES TO FIGHT IN LEBANON, AND THUS NOT ONLY BREAK THE CEASEFIRE BUT PROVIDE THE ISRAELIS WITH JUSTIFICATION FOR REFUSING TO

WITHDRAW, MR. ARAFAT MAY FIND HIMSELF AT ODDS
WITH THE SECURITY COUNCIL. TENSION RUNS HIGH IN
THE PALESTINIAN CAMP, AS SHOWN BY CONFRONTATIONS
IN AMMAN YESTERDAY BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND
JORDANIAN TROOPS AND POLICE. THE TIME MAY BE
COMING WHEN MR. ARAFAT'S AUTHORITY WILL PASS TO
EVEN MORE EXTREME LEADERS, OF WHOM, ALAS, THERE
IS NO SHORTAGE.

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IF THE ROLE OF A UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE IS TO BE
EFFECTIVE IN LEBANON, IT WILL HAVE TO BE FULLY
ACKNOWLEDGED BY ALL PARTIES. AT THE TIME OF
WRITING, THERE ARE PLANS TO BRING IN A TOKEN
LATER TODAY. SUCH TROOPS LATER WOULD BE
AUGMENTED BY UNITS FROM A NUMBER OF NATIONS,
OF WHICH IRELAND, ALREADY EXPERIENCED IN SUCH
DUTIES, IS EXPECTED TO BE ONE. WHAT IS CERTAIN
IS THAT SUCH A POSTING WOULD BE ONE OF THE MOST
TESTING TO WHICH THE UN HAS EVER COMMITTED ITSELF -
MORE COMPLEX AND MORE CONFUSED, AS ONE OBSERVER
HAS SAID, THAN THE CONGO. KRENE

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